

# NEBRASKA JUDICIAL NEWS

*A QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER FOR NEBRASKA JUDICIAL OFFICIALS AND PERSONNEL*

## Volunteer Work Results in Honors Given to Two Judges



*Judge Alan Brodbeck with wife, Karen Brodbeck (left photo) and Judge Doug Johnson with wife, Mary Johnson (right photo) receive awards at the Annual Judicial Dinner in Lincoln.*

## Service to the Judiciary Judge Alan Brodbeck

To help gauge Holt County Judge Alan Brodbeck's contribution to his profession, one only needs to dial up the Internet.

Then, type in the names "county judges" and "Nebraska," and punch the "search" button.

Onto the computer screen will pop up the home page for the Nebraska County Judges Association.

It is only one of the many accomplishments of Judge Brodbeck, a resident of O'Neill, Nebraska.

In his 17 years on the county bench, Brodbeck has earned a reputation as the "education judge" because of his long service as chairman of the county judges' education committee and other education efforts.

It is because of that service, and his many accomplishments, that Brodbeck was honored this year as the Distinguished Judge for Improvement of the Judicial System.

Brodbeck, 50, said that education of judges and court employees is an obligation because the court has so much contact with the public.

"When people come to court they form an impression about the courts

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## Judicial Awards



*Judge  
Alan L.  
Brodbeck*

and the judicial branch of government,” he said. “If we educate people to work well with the public, people will have more confidence in the judicial system.”

The judge has cultivated a long-running interest in computers, technology and the Internet into both off-beat and professional accomplishments.

He launched a web site for his family and, eventually, one for the family’s pet Himalayan cat.

Then he used his skills to build a web site for the Nebraska County Judges Association in 1998. The site is divided into two parts, a public portion that seeks to educate citizens about the workings of the court (Brodbeck even added some trivia questions to provide some entertainment). The other side is private and dedicated to information for judges only.

Brodbeck has also been newsletter editor for the judges’ association. He currently chairs the county judges’ education committee and co-chairs the Supreme Court Technology Committee.

Richardson County Judge Curtis Maschman called Brodbeck a “tireless and dedicated worker” for improvement and advancement of the judicial system.

“I am acutely aware of how valuable his work is to judges and all people who find themselves in court or working with courts,” Maschman said.

As chairperson of education, Brodbeck won top honors from the American Bar Association from his innovative education programming.

With a team of Nebraska judges, Brodbeck recently completed a proposal to the Nebraska Supreme Court to begin a full “judicial branch” education program.

The presentation, the first of its kind, was put together by Brodbeck as a Powerpoint program, a computerized slide show with dazzling graphics and illustrations. It was the culmination of many personal hours devoted by the judge in attending seminars on effective presentations and judicial branch education.

“Technology has a lot of potential but is underused by judges and courts,” the judge said. “There are a lot more things that we can do in the future.”

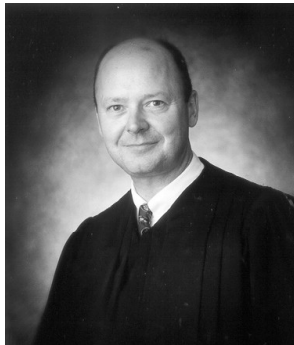
Among those, he said, would be the ability to videoconference court hearings in rural areas, and to improve communication between various courts and the Supreme Court.

Brodbeck and his wife, Karen, are the parents of two grown children, Brent and Steve. The Brodbecks have three grandchildren.

Of the award, Judge Brodbeck said he was very flattered and surprised to be honored.

“Everyone else who has won the award has done a major project and I just do little things,” he said. “I am very honored.”

## Service to Community Separate Juvenile Court Judge Douglas F. Johnson



*Judge  
Douglas L.  
Johnson*

Giving back, according to Douglas County Juvenile Court Judge Douglas F. Johnson, is not only an opportunity but a responsibility.

As a young man, it led to work at a hospice for cancer patients and to work for an Indian tribe in New Mexico.

It later steered him into studies to become a Jesuit priest, studies that he eventually left to have a family.

As a young attorney, it inspired him to pro bono legal work, serve on the board of a Catholic charity and set a career path in the juvenile court.

As a judge, it has inspired Johnson to seek ways of improving justice in the separate juvenile court and helping others understand its workings.

For his unselfish commitment to the community, Judge Johnson was honored this year as the Distinguished Judge for Service to the Community in the Nebraska Supreme Court's Judicial Awards.

Johnson, a 47-year-old, married father of two, said that he was surprised by the award.

"I feel very fortunate — my education, my religious training has taught me to give back, to want to give back, to provide a 'hand up' through different opportunities and organizations," he said. "I feel blessed. I am the one who is grateful."

Appointed to the bench in 1993 by then-Gov. Ben Nelson, Johnson has continued to maintain a rigorous schedule as a volunteer and leader within his community, church and profession despite the rigors of an active caseload and family obligations.

He said that he tries to balance his obligations with the help of his wife, Mary.

"When I was with the Jesuits, I learned a lot about keeping balance. And the family is first," Johnson said. "I like music, singing, the arts and reading . . . keeping balance helps you keep in touch with a whole bunch of things."

From 1987 to 2000, he served on the board of directors of the St. Vincent de Paul Stores, the Goodwill store of the Catholic Church. He has been a long-time member of the Safety and Health Council of Greater Omaha.

At his church, St. Vincent de Paul in west Omaha, Johnson has been a member of the school board and, for two years, the president of the board. A talented guitarist and vocalist, he has been a long-time musical leader at masses and at other parish functions.

He said it was his interest and love for children that guided him to practice in the juvenile court and eventually apply for a judgeship.

"Children are the future; they are our hope," Johnson said.

As a judge, he has led efforts to educate lawyers and non-lawyers about the workings of the juvenile court and to make changes that have improved the workings of the judicial system.

"He is the kind of judge who brings a human face to judging," said Patrick Borchers, dean and professor of law at Creighton University School of Law.

Johnson has taught at the law school since 1995, teaching juvenile law.

He serves on the Board of Trustees of the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges, and is involved in the Permanency Planning for Children Project.

Johnson has been a teacher and speaker for the Foster Care Review Board and The Troubled Children and Youth Conferences, and played a major role in starting the Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) program in Douglas County. It designates trained volunteers to look after the best interests of juveniles involved with the court.

He also is an enthusiastic and dynamic presenter during the yearly

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# SPOTLIGHT ON JUDGES

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tours of the Omaha Law League which brings 700-800 4th grade students to the courthouse and city offices in Omaha.

Visits with the judges are a highlight of the trip, according to Mary Stultz, the tour coordinator, and Judge Johnson, in particular, is well received due to his passion and encouragement.

"He makes a lasting impression on the students," Stultz said.

But the judge might be best known for starting a series of free "brown bag" educational lectures at the Douglas County Juvenile Court. The lectures, which began in 1998 when Johnson was presiding judge of the court, focus on issues pertaining to children and families.

Issues like using child victims as trial witnesses, grief and separation, domestic violence and stress management have been presented by authorities in those fields during the lunch-time seminars.

Not just prosecutors and defense attorneys attend the luncheons, but probation officers, legal aid workers, social services caseworkers, teachers and court administrators as well.

"It is a learning tool for attorneys," said Omaha lawyer Catherine Shugrue-Schaffner. "The information they learn at these seminars promotes efficiency in the Juvenile Court process."

Johnson said he got the idea during a discussion with a colleague in the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court, who had organized a brown-bag lecture series in her court in Virginia.

"People who work for the court don't get easily available opportunities to further their training," he said. "The brown bag sessions are accessible, free, quick, and offer significant information."

The National Council, he said, has provided a wonderful education through visits to other courts, technical assistance and just sharing with colleagues.

"Those judges have a broad view. It gets you out of your own microcosm," Johnson said. "I have encouraged all my colleagues to get involved and many have."

Judge Johnson said he credits his wife for helping him balance his family, profession and other obligations. "We support each other a great deal in what we do," he said.

The couple has two daughters, Anne, 8, and Kathleen, 6. ❖